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SHAKSPEARE.

Oration

DELIVERED BY

THE HONORABLE JOSEPH HOWE,

AT THE REQUEST OF

THE SAINT GEORGE'S SOCIETY,

At the Temperance Hall,

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA,

23rd APRIL, 1864.

HALIFAX, N. S.

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SHAKSPEARE.

Not quite two thousand years ago, in a small village of Judea, a poor Carpenter's wife was blessed with a son, who grew to manhood beneath his reputed father's roof—who wrote nothing which has been preserved, who died young, and who but for four or five years appeared conspicuously on the stage of public life.

This divine man so lived, for that short space of time, that by the dignity of his person—the grace and fascination of his manner—the purity and simplicity of his life—the splendor of his eloquence—the novelty of his doctrines—the miraculous power which he displayed, he so alarmed the hierarchs and bigots of his day, that they put him to death, to extirpate what they conceived to be a pestilent heresy dangerous to existing institutions.

A few short discourses—one new commandment—some exquisite parables—a few noble bursts of righteous indignation—a fervent prayer here and there—two or three touching lamentations—some simple reproofs—and a few beautiful illustrations of his courtesy to women and children, and of his sympathetic consideration for the wants and weaknesses of his fellow men, are all that remain to us of the Biography and recorded speech of this poor youth.

Yet every Sabbath, all over the Christian world, millions of people assemble to do honor to this person—to repeat his words—to ponder upon his life, and to endeavour to mould the growing generations by his example. We, in view of the miracles he wrought and of the wisdom of his teaching, acknowledge his divine origin and attributes; but millions, who regard him only as a man, are yet won to daily and weekly recog-

nition of the holiness of his life—the wisdom of his words, and of the self-sacrificing spirit in which he died for the redemption and security of his fellow-men.

How many Emperors, Kings, Conquerors, Tyrants, have lived and died within these two thousand years, for whom no festivals are kept—whose example no man quotes—whose wisdom no man ponders. Their mailed figures, as they appear in history, seem to shake the earth, their pride to flout the skies—their policy to cover the globe. Yet there they lie, the best of them with their marble or bronze hands folded on their stone sarcophagi, looking up to the Heaven they outraged, and challenging from the earth which they devastated but scanty notice or recognition. From all which we gather, shutting divinity out of the question, that the world knows and will ever know its benefactors from its oppressors—that the beauty of holiness outlasts mere earthly splendor—that the still small voice of wisdom will go echoing through the hearts of successive generations, whom the hoarse command of authority cannot stir.

A little more than a century ago a child was born in the cottage of a poor Scotch peasant in Ayreshire, and but a few years have passed since the Centennial Anniversary of that boy's birth was kept throughout the civilized world. You kept it here. I was not present, but I read the account of your celebration with interest and pride. Throughout the British Empire—all over this continent, wherever the British races mingle and British literature is read, bonfires blazed and cities were illuminated—Balls were given, and Dinners and Suppers were enlivened by the songs of Burns or by sentiments uttered in his praise. I happened to be in Boston, the city that, next to Halifax and London, for many reasons, I like the best, and where I feel the most at home. Two festivals were held, one at the Revere House by the North British Society, the other at the Parker House, by the leading literati of New England. I was honored by invitations to both,

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and at both witnessed the enthusiasm of the hour and the intellectual affluence of the community. The Governor of the State, the Mayor of the city, the leading Merchants and Bankers, the Professors of Cambridge, Whittier and Emerson, Holmes and Hilliard, Fields and Whipple, and a score more of men who give animation to the social, and fire to the public life of the old Bay State, were there; and we all lifted our voices to honour the memory of that poor Scotch Peasant, and bowed our heads in reverential thankfulness above his literary remains. What we were doing in Boston, you were doing here, and the intellectual and appreciative all over the world were doing in the same spirit on the same occasion.

Now, how did it happen that the noble and the high-born, the Scholar, the Novelist, the Historian, the Statesman, the Poet, all mingling with the joyous acclamations of those wider classes that come more nearly down to his own worldly station, gave point and significance to festivals got up to honour the memory of a poor Ploughman a century after he had passed away? The man was no saint—sharp of speech and loose of life, at times he had tried the patience of many friends, and made many enemies. He had lived and died in poverty; his errors, whatever they were, being veiled by no drapery of convention, nor refined away by the ordinary accessories of elegant self-indulgence. He left behind him no relatives who could defend his memory—no sect to battle for his opinions—no wealth to purchase venal advocacy—no station or organized influence to disarm independent criticism. How was it then, that all the world, by a simultaneous impulse, moved as one man to do honor, on the same day, to the memory of this poor Scotch Ploughman?

It was because, long after he was dead, and his faults and follies were forgotten, it was discovered (as it had been before by a few keen sighted and appreciative friends who knew and loved him) that in this man's soul there had been genuine inspiration—that he was a patriot—an artist—that by his genius, and independent

spirit, he had given dignity to the pursuits by which the mass of mankind live, and quickened our love of nature by exquisite delineation. It was found that hypocrisy stood rebuked in presence of his broad humor—that he had put one lyric invocation into the mouth of a dead warrior that would be worth to his country, in any emergency, an army of ten thousand men—that he had painted one picture of his country's rural life, so touching and so true, that it challenged for her the respect of millions who knew her not, and gave character and refinement to the thoughts of those who knew her best.

What has become of the wrangling race of bloody Chieftains, whose mutual slaughter and mutual perfidy Tytler so well describes? With the exception of Wallace and Bruce, we would not give the Ayrshire Ploughman for a legion of them. What has become of the drowsy Holy Willies, whose interminable homilies made the Sabbath wearisome, in Burns' time, and the gospel past finding out? They are dozing in the churchyards, as their congregations dozed in the churches; and no one asks to have them waked up by a festival; yet the man they denounced, and would have burnt if they could, shows his "Cottar's Saturday Night" to the admiring world and puts them all to shame.

Three hundred years ago (1564) William Shakspeare, whose Birth Day we have met to celebrate, was born, of comparatively obscure parentage, at Stratford-upon-Avon, a small English village. His father, John Shakspeare, dealt in wool, and though at one period of his life he had been better off, was, before the Poet's death, so poor as to be exempted from the payment of local assessments. His mother, Mary Arden, was descended from a family some members of which had served the office of Sheriff, and brought to her husband, as dower, 65 acres of land and £6 13 4 in money. Our Poet was the eldest of ten children. Before he was three months old the Plague ravaged his native

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village, carrying off a seventh part of its population, but seems to have spared his family. He was educated at the Free School of Stratford, till withdrawn to assist his father, whose circumstances were becoming straitened. At eighteen he married Anne Hatheway, and commenced business for himself, but, being arrested with some other youngsters for Deer Stalking in Sir Thomas Lucy's Park, to escape the law he fled to London, and joined a company of Players. He became an Actor, a Dramatist, a Poet, a Theatrical Manager, won the favor of the Earl of Southampton, and of Queen Elizabeth. He earned a competence, and after the death of the virgin Queen retired to his native village, where he purchased a handsome house and enjoyed an income of £300 a year. He had three children. He died on his birth-day, the 23rd of April, at the early age of 53.

This is nearly all that is known, with certainty, of the marvellous man whose tri-Centenary we have met to celebrate. The very acute Editor of one of the latest and finest collections of his works, thus mourns over the paucity of material for any authentic and enlarged Biography:—"That William Shakspeare was born at Stratford-upon-Avon; that he married and had three children; that he wrote a certain number of Dramas; that he died before he had attained to old age, and was buried in his native town, are positively the only facts, in the personal history of this extraordinary man, of which we are certainly possessed; and if we should be solicitous to fill up this bare and most unsatisfactory outline, we must have recourse to the vague reports of unsubstantial tradition, or to the still more shadowy inferences of lawless and unsatisfactory conjecture."

Whether Shakspeare actually held gentlemen's horses at the door of the Theatre before he became an Actor—how much or how little he knew of Latin or Greek, or of any foreign language; to what books he was indebted for his plots, his conceits or his imagery, are questions which we linger not to-day

to ask or to answer. Have not these, and other kindred themes of speculation and conjecture, for more than a century furnished employment for ingenious critics and commentators? We must brush them aside. If we stood by the grave of Richard Cœur de Leon, we should not pause to enquire who taught him tricks of fence, or of what nutriment his muscle had been formed; and, standing beside the grave of this great Englishman, it is enough for us to know that he lived, and died, and made the universe his heirs.

This man founded no sect, sat on no throne, conducted no Government, led no army, upheaved no ancient dominion. How is it, then, that three hundred years after he has been dead and buried, in a Province of which he never heard—which was a wilderness for two hundred years after he was born—how happens it that in a city not founded for a century and a half after he was in his grave, we are assembled to hold high festival on this man's natal day? How does it occur that the highest in military rank and civic station comes here at the head of all that is distinguished by culture, and refinement, to do honor to the memory of Shakspeare? that the Parliament adjourns—that the Courts are closed—that business is suspended—that the place where "merchants most do congregate" is deserted, and that all ranks and classes, by a common impulse, have gathered here to do honor to this man's memory? As your procession moved through the streets, the scene was most imposing, and now I can scarcely see your heads for banners consecrated to every branch of our nationality and to every form of christian benevolence—faces as fresh as Rosalind's and eyes as bright as Juliet's smile approbation or rain influence on this scene, until the heart dances at the sight of an intellectual community doing homage to genius by methods the most graceful and—with a unanimity that is marvellous.

On Saturday evening this Hall resounded with the music interspersed through Shakspeare's Plays. Mr. Passow will presently

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delight us with some readings. We shall plant an Oak on the sunny side of our Provincial Building in commemoration of this Tri-Centenary celebration, and close the day with the feast of reason and the flow of soul. To-night we re-assemble here, to enjoy a second time the delightful entertainment which the Officers and Soldiers of the Garrison have kindly consented to repeat.

But, after all, what is our poor Festival, rich in sincerity and enthusiasm though it be, compared with what we know will elsewhere make this day memorable. All over the British Islands, all over the British Empire, it will be kept as a holiday, and enlivened with all that intellect of the highest order can contribute, or art the most chastened yet elaborate combine.

In the great Metropolis of the World, whose financial pulsations are marked by millions—where war or peace, for half the universe, trembles in the hourly vibrations of human thought—where men battle for wealth, and distinctions and worldly power, with an intensity proportioned to the value of the prizes to be won, even there on this day the great heart of the Empire will be stilled for a time, that all the world may witness how profound is the impression which the genius of Shakspeare has made in that Imperial City, where for centuries his Dramas have nightly contributed to the intellectual life of the population.

At Stratford, the Birth Place of the Poet, a Pavilion has been erected which will hold 5000 people—550 musicians have been engaged, and Concerts, Oratorios, Balls, and Theatrical performances, will gather together, for a week's unmixed enjoyment, an assemblage not more distinguished by wealth and station, than remarkable for intellectual culture and shrewd knowledge of books and men.

But not only in England will this day be kept. In Ireland, where the memories of her Poets, and Dramatists and Orators, are treasured as the richest element of national life, the great Englishman, who was loved and honored by them all, will be this day

crowned with the deepest verdure and hailed by universal acclamation. Scotland will put aside her theology and metaphysics, and the fiery cross, with Shakspeare's name upon it, will be sped from city to city and from mountain to mountain, rousing the clans to rivalry with all the world. Bonfires will blaze upon Ben Nevis and Ben Venue, and the bones of her great Poets will stir beneath the marble monuments that national gratitude has reared above them in recognition of the merits of this great master of our tongue.

All over the Empire—in the great Provinces of the East—in the Australian Colonies—at the Cape—in the West Indies—in the neighboring Provinces of Canada and New Brunswick no less than in the Summer Isles, where, if Prospero's wand no longer waves, we have Moore's warrant and our own experience to assure us that Miranda's fascinations may yet be found; wherever British communities have been formed and British civilization has been fostered, will this day be honored, and the memory of this great man be "in their flowing cups freshly remembered."

If our American cousins, North and South, do not keep this Festival as they kept that in honor of Burns, it will not be from want of inclination, or from ignorance of the merits of the great Dramatist whose works they read, appreciate, act and quote, with an admiration as intense and with a familiarity as ready as our own. Engaged in these "great wars," which, from their magnitude of proportion, ought "to make ambition virtue," and which another Shakspeare, half a century hence, will be required to illustrate, they may not have leisure for any but military celebrations; but of this we may be assured, that Shakspeare has gone with the camp furniture of every Regiment, into the field, whether north or south of the Potomac; and that his glorious pages have cheered the bivouac and the hospital, whenever the tedious hours of inaction were to be wiled away, or the "ills that flesh is heir to," and which combats surely bring, have had to be endured.

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Nor will these manifestations be confined to the lands which the British races inhabit. All over the continent, where Shakspeare is known as we know Goethe or Voltaire—where his works have been translated and illustrated by men the most discriminating and profound, this day will be honored, and his name, making the circuit of "the great globe itself," will not only awake the "drum beat" which indicates the waving lines of British power and dominion, but the echoes of warm hearts and sympathetic natures in every quarter of the earth.

Shakspeare left behind him, when he died, thirty-seven Dramas, and a few Poems. Upon these his reputation rests: but it is curious to reflect how tardy the world, now so unanimous in its verdict, was in recognizing its benefactor. That Queen Elizabeth, and the brilliant men by whom she was always surrounded, applauded his plays in the old Globe Theatre which he managed, and enjoyed his Poems in their studious hours, we have authentic record. That the sturdy middle class of English society, for whom his Plays were written, wept and laughed three centuries ago exactly as we weep and laugh no man can doubt. That the critics in the pit wondered then, as now, at the fertility of his invention, while the gods in the gallery roared at his inexhaustible humour, are facts which we may assume to lie upon the surface of all safe speculation. But how did it happen that, for more than a century, his works appear to have passed from the minds of men, and that his reputation, like the aloe, took an hundred years to bloom? Who can safely answer this question? For more than two centuries, the European races trod the soil of Nova Scotia without perceiving the gold that lay beneath their feet; the Temple Church was buried in rubbish for more than a century, till its beautiful proportions and elegant ornamentation were redeemed and restored, by a tender and loving process, akin to that by which the dramatic works of Shakspeare have been redeemed and illustrated.

The Poet appears to have taken but little pains to ingratiate

himself with posterity. Though he published his Poems, which went through several editions, during his lifetime, but few of his Dramatic Works were printed, while he lived. The whole were collected and published by his fellow-comedians seven years after his death.

But in 1623, the year in which they were published, the world was beginning to be busy about other things than stage plays and dead Poets. That great Historical Drama, in many Acts, of which England was to become the Theatre, was in course of preparation. James the First, with his pedantic learning, haughty favorites and high prerogative notions, was passing away, amidst a storm of Parliamentary eloquence more intensely exciting even than Dramatic Literature. Elliot and Pym, Hampden and Vane, were unfolding the grievances of England as Mark Anthony bared the wounds of Cæsar in the forum. The first Act closed with the death of James two years after the publication of Shakspeare's Plays, and Charles the First ascended the Throne in 1625.

By and bye money was wanted for foolish continental wars, and the Commons of England were determined that the redress of grievances and supplies should go together. The Star Chamber was busy with arrests and thumb-screws, and Laud was dictating to all earnest-minded Englishmen how they should worship God, and what they should believe. The "times are out of joint," and sweet Will Shakspeare must wait awhile for recognition

"Till the hurly burly's done,
And the battle lost and won."

Then Ship Money is demanded and resisted, and Charles comes down to seize the members in the Commons House of Parliament. Then Prynne's ears are cut off in the Pillory, and the leaders of the people are fined and imprisoned; and now the action of the great Drama becomes intensely exciting—the Counties begin to arm, and Hampden lives in the saddle. The King's Standard is set up, and a rough looking soldierly man, with broad shoulders, a

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huge head and some pimples on his face, begins to attract attention, as Washington did long after when a man of action was required. By 1642, nineteen years after Shakspeare's Plays were printed, the Cavaliers and Roundheads are fairly at it. Then come Edgehill, Marston Moor and Naseby. Hampden and Falkland are dead, Laud and Wentworth executed. People are too busy making history to care much about representations of it, and Shakspeare must sleep on.

The slovenly looking soldier with the broad chest has come to the front, and, at the head of a marvellous regiment of cavalry, has trampled down, on every battle field, everything opposed to him. People may be excused for not thinking of Shakspeare, with such a phenomenon as Cromwell, in living flesh and blood, treading the stage before their eyes.

Then come the capture of the King and his execution—Irish and Scotch wars, Drogheda and Dunbar, more materials for History rapidly accumulating. Then there are pestilent Dutchmen—Von Tromp, De Wit and De Ruyter, in the Channel with 120 ships, prepared to land and burn all the Theatres and other property of the nation; and Shakspeare must be quiet while Monk and Deane, and other gallant Englishmen, sweep this nuisance out of the narrow seas. And swept it was by the besom of destruction, and no brooms have been hoisted in the channel since.

And by and bye there is peace at home and abroad, and the Lord Protector, with John Milton for his Secretary and John Howe for his Chaplain, is standing on the place where the Throne of England stood, known of all men as a redoubtable soldier and a most wary politician. But Oliver, though he loved a grim joke at times, and could snatch off his son Richard's wig at a wedding, or smear Dick Marten's face with ink after signing the Death Warrant, was no favorer of stage plays, and it behoved Will Shakspeare to be quiet until he had made his exit.

England was parcelled out into Districts, and a stern Major

General, of the true Cromwellian stamp, ruled over each, with orders to pull down the May-poles, close up the Theatres and set amusing vagabonds in the stocks. "There were no more cakes and ale," and if "ginger" was "hot" in anybody's "mouth" the less he said about it the better.

But England is nothing if she be not "merrie." She had prayed and fought her way to freedom, as she thought, but here were new forms of restraint, and a tyranny more irksome than that from which she had escaped. Better pay Ship Money, and lose an ear once in a while, than have no more village sports and city recreations. The Queen has been in mourning but for two short years, yet John Bull grumbles at the gloom. All places of public amusement have been open, and everybody, outside of the Royal circle, has done just as he pleased; yet something was wanting while the Queen was sad, and a cheerful Sovereign is as necessary to England as a Free Press and a Free Parliament. Cromwell, with all his sagacity, and bewildered in the theological fogs of the period, did not understand this. He died, and "apres mois le deluge." The reaction of cheerfulness came with the Restoration—the Theatres were re-opened and the May-poles went up again. And now, one might fairly assume, that Shakspeare's hour had come. But it did not.

Charles, who had been twelve years an exile, if he had not lost his English cheerfulness had become a foreigner in all his tastes. The men who had shared his expatriation, had learned to speak and write and think in French and other foreign languages; and foreign literature—dramatic literature especially, which day by day beguiled the tedious hours of banishment, had become a necessary of life. Foreign tastes came back with the Court, and were of course cultivated by the higher classes.

How was it with the great body of the people? The wars of the Roses had ceased to interest them. They had had a civil war of their own, brought home to their very doors with stern reality.

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What were the fictitious sorrows of dethroned monarchs, compared with the real tragedy behind Whitehall? The ravings of Margaret and the lamentations of Constance were forgotten in presence of Henrietta Maria, with her children in her hand, taking leave of the Royal Husband she was to behold no more. The men who had seen a charge of the Ironsides were not easily stirred by a flourish of trumpets on the stage; and those who had seen Hampden, Rupert, Essex, Ireton, and Desborough, in the saddle, required no poet to show them what the men and horses were like that broke the French at Agincourt and Poitiers. And so sweet Will Shakspeare slept on through the Restoration as he had done through the Protectorate, until the Court of England was composed of men and women who had been bred at home—who could relish English humour and English sentiment; and a sturdy middle class had grown up, who had wondered at Milton and laughed at Hudibras till they were weary of both; and had begun to long for something less exaggerated, and more germane to the realities of every day human life. The Puritan warriors and Cavaliers had passed off the scene; and, to the new generation, who knew them not, both civil wars were alike historical: while the Feudal chivalry of York and Lancaster, as drawn by Shakspeare, seemed, of the two battalia, the most picturesque.

Another King had been driven out—the people had seized the purse strings—Responsible Government was established—"the liberty of unlicensed Printing" had been secured, and glorious John Dryden, Prior and Ben Johnson, had taught the People of England the flexibility and music of our mother tongue; and Bunyan, Locke, De Foe and Addison, had shown how all-sufficient it was for the expression of arguments the most subtle, and for the highest flights of the most luxuriant imagination.

Then the discovery was made that a dead Englishman, who had been buried a hundred years, had left to his countrymen a literary treasure of inestimable value. What was Caesar's legacy of seven-

ty-five drachmas to each of the citizens of Rome?—here was a treasure inexhaustible, and capable of sub-division among the British races to the end of time. What were Cæsar's

“walks,
His private arbors, and new planted orchards,
On this side Tiber?”

Here were the gardens of the Hesperides, richer in enchantment than the bowers of Calypso and Armida—orchards, where apples of gold in pictures of silver were hung within the reach of all—arbors that a Mussulman warrior would die to inherit, with Imogene and Thasia, Cressida and Titania, Portia and Jessica, Helena, Cordelia, Olivia and Beatrice, flitting through the foliage, with fascinations ever varying and smiles that could never fade.

With a spirit of deep reverence and unselfish love did the great Poets and Critics of modern England address themselves to the task of exhuming this treasure, and making known to their countrymen its extent and value. Foremost in this good work were Rowe and Theobald, Pope, Warburton and Johnson; and after them have come critics and commentators by the score, till every obsolete phrase has been explained, every old word translated into current English, every blemish detected, every beauty brought to the surface. In this labor of love Goethe, and Schlegel and Voltaire, and the finer minds of Continental Europe, have labored with diligence and often with keen discrimination, until the subject has been exhausted, and now no wise man looks for a new fact or for a plausible suggestion.

A brilliant series of great actors and actresses have devoted their lives to the study of Shakspeare's Plays, and have won fortune and high distinction by their illustration. Garrick, Mrs. Siddons, the Keans and Kembles, Macready, and many other brilliant Artists, have, for a hundred and fifty years, presented to succeeding generations the master-pieces of this great Dramatist. Yet “custom cannot stale his infinite variety,” and still “excess of appetite doth grow by what it feeds on.”

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During these hundred and fifty years the genius of Shakspeare has kept possession of the public mind, appealed to by rivals in every walk of literature, and it may be safely said that no book except the Bible, has taken a hold of it so universal and so firm, Tried by every test, read in the light of ancient and modern literature, Shakspeare has not only held his own, but has steadily risen in general estimation.

Within the period which has passed since he lived and wrote, the Classics, redeemed from the wrecks of ancient civilization, have been edited with care and elegantly translated into every modern language. *Æschylus* and *Euripides*, *Plautus* and *Terence*, can now be read with as much facility as Shakspeare. The great dramatists of France, appealing to a population to whom theatricals and bread are the necessities of life, have constructed Tragedies of stately severity, and lighter pieces in every vein of humour. *Alfieri*, in Italy, and *Calderon* and *Lope de Vega*, in Spain, have presented their master-pieces to the admiring world. *Schiller's* great dramas, beautifully rendered into English by *Joanna Bailey*, have enriched the literature of Germany; while in our own country *Addison*, *Congreve*, *Younge*, *Home*, and *Otway*; *Byron*, *Shelley*, *Talfourd* and *Knowles*, with all the phases of modern civilization expanding before them, with free access to all the treasures of ancient and modern literature, and with the "moving accidents by flood and field" which history and biography have accumulated in those three hundred years, have done their best; and each has won a place in the loving hearts touched by their genius, and refined and elevated by the exquisite harmony of their verse. But which of all these men would we venture to put beside Shakspeare? If they were all assembled here to-day, they would confess their several obligations to the great Poet, who "exhausted worlds and then imagined new," and join with us in crowning him as the great master of their art.

Now what is the secret of this great success—of this universal

homage? Who shall give the answer? The ocean, with its majestic waves, fathomless depths, and ever receding outlines, who can measure or define? The starry heavens are incomprehensible to the astronomer, who can weigh the planets as to the peasant who, in simple love and reverence, sees them shine above his head. The incendiary, who destroyed the Temple of Diana, could not comprehend the secret of that universal admiration which made his act a sacrilege and a crime. We stand beside Niagara, or beneath the dome of St. Peter's, or St. Paul's, and are overpowered by a sense of sublimity and beauty, for which we thank God, but which it is extremely difficult to analyse. We hang over a beautiful statue, or gaze at a fine picture, but are lost and bewildered when we come to describe why it touches our feelings, or excites our involuntary admiration.

If the phenomena of nature, the sublimities of architecture, and the miracles of high art, thus impress and confound us, we can readily understand how it is that we stand awe-struck and bewildered in presence of a writer who is at once a creator and an artist; at whose command "cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces" spring out of the earth—who sets the sublime "artillery of Heaven" to music—who presents to our admiring gaze forms that would defy the chisel of Canova or the pencil of Sir Peter Lely; who sketches scenery with the warmth of Claude and the dripping softness of Gainsborough; who reasons like a philosopher, speaks like a statesman, and jests like a King's fool; who infuses life into the dead bones of History: clothes Warriors and Kings and Prelates with living flesh and blood; and makes them unfold their policy as though he had been familiar with their counsels, and act and speak as though a Photographer and Reporter had been present all the time. We accept this man as a gift from the All-bountiful Creator, but we cannot comprehend him, or fathom the secret springs of his ascendancy and power.

The reason why Englishmen should love him, as the Scotch do

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Burns, and the Irish Moore, may not be far to seek. He has won the first place in universal literature for his country, and he has won it, so far as any body can discover, without ever having been out of England. He seems to have been beloved by his cotemporaries, and those who knew him best. Though honored with the favor of his Sovereign and the patronage and friendship of Southampton, he was not spoilt. "I loved the man," said old Ben Johnson who knew him well, "and did honor his memory, on this side of idolatry, as much as any. He was indeed honest, of an open and free nature, had an excellent fancy, brave notions and gentle expressions." "Gentle Shakspeare," the "Swan of Avon," "Sweet Will"—these were the endearing names given to him by his cotemporaries, and they have come down to us as the best evidence that can be furnished of the personal qualities he displayed.

That he was a dear lover of his country who can doubt? With what pride and exultation and entire confidence he speaks of her fortunes and her future, at a time when her great career of conquest and of Empire had hardly begun :

"This royal throne of kings, this sceptred Isle,
 This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
 This other Eden, demi-paradise;
 This fortress, built by Nature for herself
 Against infection and the hand of war;
 This happy breed of men, this little world;
 This precious stone set in the silver sea,
 Which serves it in the office of a wall,
 Or as a moat defensive to a house,
 Against the envy of less happy lands;
 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
 This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
 Fear'd by their breed and famous by their birth;
 Renown'd for their deeds as far from home,
 (For christian service and true chivalry)
 As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry,
 Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's son,
 This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,
 Dear for her reputation through the world."

Again, he calls her "our sea-walled garden," which she has remained, thank God, to this hour. And again :

" That water-walled bulwark, still secure
And confident from foreign purposes.
This England never did (nor never shall)
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror."

Shakspeare had seen the proud Spanish Armada, with its 130 ships of war, its 2650 "great guns," and 30,000 men, scattered by the hand of Providence, and by the valor of Drake and Howard ; and he might well exult in the valor of his countrymen and in the impregnability of the "little island" that he loved. Could he see her now, with her 670 war ships, her well disciplined army and her 150,000 volunteers, he would not be less confident in her destiny.

How like the blast of a trumpet has that magnificent speech which Shakspeare puts into the mouth of our Fifth Harry on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt, rung through the hearts of Englishmen in all parts of the world ! At Torres Vedras, at Waterloo, at Inkermann, at Lucknow and Delhi, wherever our countrymen have been far from home and hard bestead, Shakspeare's glorious thoughts have been uppermost in their minds.

The time may come, in these British Provinces, when we may be called upon to test the purity of our lineage and "the metal of our pastures;" and, when it comes, let us hope that Shakspeare's invocation may not be lost upon us. Our volunteers and militia-men show well upon parade, in their "gayness" and their "gilt," but when the "working day" comes, and they

"are all besmirch'd
With rainy marching in the painful field,"

let us hope that they will emulate the valour of the Mother Isles, without a Westmoreland wish to have "more men from England."

Shakspeare's National Dramas are a valuable addition to the History of our country. An Admiral of some celebrity declared

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that he read nothing else. I have read nearly all the works of our popular Historians, but how few of them present the scenes they describe with the vividness of Shakspeare? and where is there one that presents the men of by-gone periods with the same dramatic power? Hundreds of illustrations could be given. Take Hume's account of Buckingham's intrigues to secure the Throne for Richard, with that which the Duke himself gives of the scene at the Guildhall; or contrast his description of the murder of the young Princes with that in which Shakspeare shows us how

"the murderers,

Albeit they were flesh'd villains, bloody dogs,
Melting with tenderness and mild compassion
Wept like two children, in their death's sad story.
"O thus," quoth Dighton, "lay the gentle babes,—
"Thus, thus," quoth Forest, "girdling one another
"Within their alabaster innocent arms:
"Their lips were four red roses on a stalk
"Which in their summer beauty kissed each other
"A book of prayers on their pillow lay;
"Which once," quoth Forrest, "almost changed my mind,"
"But, O the devil"—there the villain stopped;
When Dighton thus told on—"we smothered
"The most replenished, sweet work of nature,
"That, from the prime creation, e'er she framed."
Hence both are gone, with conscience and remorse
They could not speak; and so I left them both
To bear these tidings to the bloody king."

Here we have the whole scene. This is the picture that all Painters copy, and when we visit the Chamber in the Tower, or recall this touching event in English History, it is with Shakspeare's and not Hume's language in our thoughts.

The same may be said of the ten National Dramas, including seven reigns, and spreading over a period of three hundred years. The portions of History which Shakspeare has illustrated are invariably those into which we have the clearest insight, and to which we return again and again with interest deepening as we read.

Of Queen Elizabeth we have only the Christening benediction and a fine foreshadowing at the close of Henry the 8th, but what would we not give for a Drama by Shakspeare, in which the two rival Queens, with Cecil and Walsingham, Raleigh and Essex, Bothwell and Rizzio, were sketched with the distinctness of the Yorkists and Lancastrians of an earlier period? and, coming down to the later Civil Wars, how hard we find it, without Shakspeare's guidance and portraiture, to gather from all the historians and biographers (and they are numerous enough) the same vivid realistic notions of Cromwell and Monk, of Rupert, Ireton, Waller, Fleetwood, and other Cavaliers and Parliamentarians, that he has given us of Hotspur, Falconbridge, Warwicke, or John of Gaunt.

But we are not only indebted to Shakspeare for clearer views of English History, but for some marvellous delineations of stirring events and portraitures of remarkable men in times more remote. Plutarch and Livy are highly dramatic and picturesque, and yet we rise from the perusal of their charming volumes with a dreamy and indistinct impression of the scenes they describe, and of the characters they pourtray. There is a haze of remote antiquity which we cannot completely penetrate; and the stately language they employ, while it fascinates, often elevates us above the range of practical business, and the point of view from which a clear insight can be had into the affairs of common life.

Shakspeare, in Julius Cæsar and Coriolanus, takes us to Rome, and gives us the very spirit of the scenes that he animates with real bustling human beings. We hear the mob roaring in the streets—the orators speaking in the forum—we almost touch their robes and feel their warm breath upon our faces. The topics are different, but the men are perfectly present to our senses, as an English mob would be shouting in Charing Cross, or Lord Derby or John Bingle speaking in Parliament. His Greeks are just as life-like. When an Englishman reads Homer, though he is charmed by the rapidity and variety of movement, and by the exquisite skill of

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the versification, the celestial machinery is a sad drawback. We should take but little interest in a charge of cavalry at Balaclava, or in a fight between King and Heenan, if Juno were to interpose a cloud, or catch up a pugilist, when the Russians or the American were getting the worst of it. In *Troiless* and *Cresida* there are no Gods and Goddesses : but Greeks and Trojans, so life-like and natural, that we hear them rail, and jest, mourn, and make love, as though our own blood relations or familiar friends were conducting the dialogues ; and when the combats begin, whether single or general, it is stern, English hand to hand fighting by the heady currents of which we are swept along, till we almost bet the odds, and clap our hands with excitement, as the blows are struck or the charges are delivered and sustained. By the aid of Shakspeare I can see the burly form of Ajax, in action or repose as, distinctly as I can see Shaw the Life Guardsman. Hector's plume is as much a reality to me as General Doyle's, and Astyanax, introduced by the Bard of Avon, is a genuine English Baby.

But wherever he wafts us it is the same. We revel in the warm air of Cyprus and drink the Greek wine with Cassio—we float down the Nile with Cleopatra—or stand upon the blasted heath with Macbeth ; and our difficulty is not so much to realize the scene as to get back to full possession of our identity, and to be sure that we are not a part of it.

Of the Dramas which are not simply historical but “of imagination all compact,” I have left myself no time to speak. But what could I say if I had the whole afternoon ? Volumes have been written about them, and the subject is still fresh and new. “To gild refined gold, to paint the lily or add a perfume to the violet,” we have warrant for believing “is wasteful and ridiculous excess.” All I will say is, that from boyhood upwards these great masterpieces have been a study and a delight. They have own me from the distraction of State cares when these were most perplexing—they have charmed the evil spirit out of me often when

I would have hurled a javelin or launched a sarcasm. Their harmonies have interlaced the wildest discords, and lent a silver edging to the darkest clouds of a somewhat stormy life.

Shakspeare's minor poems would form a charming subject for a separate paper. They are less known than his Dramas, but are not less deserving of constant study by all who desire to comprehend the whole scope of the great Artist's power, or who desire to enjoy the melifluous sweetness and flexibility of "our land's language."

But it may be asked, of what use are these celebrations? They have many uses. Wherever God, for his own wise purposes, has endowed a human being with great powers, and these have been wisely used, it behoves us reverently to discern and to acknowledge the Divine afflatus. It is becoming and proper also that we should offer up the tribute of grateful hearts to the mighty dead whose works live after them. More people have seen Shakspeare's Dramas acted than now inhabit the British Islands; and millions, who have perhaps never entered a theatre, have yet read his works with infinite instruction and delight. Is it too much, then, to dedicate one day in three centuries to mutual felicitations for this especial gift? The bird, that hangs by our casement, charms us twenty times a week by his sweet notes to involuntary gratitude to the Creator, who smoothed his plumage and made his voice so clear; and shall we not be thankful for that sweet Songster, whose music has been throughout life a solace and an inspiration? Oh! yes, ingratitude was the sin by which the angels fell; and if, as a people, we would prosper or aspire, let us not be ungrateful.

If it be permitted to the Bard of Avon to look down upon the earth this day, he will see his "sea-walled garden" not only secure from intrusion, but every foot of it embellished with all that wealth can accumulate or art display. But he will see more—he will see her "happy breed of men" covering the seas and planting the universe; rearing free communities in every quarter of the globe;

creating a literature which every year enriches ; and moulding her institutions to the easy government of countless millions by the light of large experience. He will see more. He will see the three kingdoms, hostile or disjointed at his death, united by mutual interests, and forming together a great centre of power and dominion ; bound in mutual harmony and dependence by networks of iron roads and telegraphic communications, and by lines of floating palaces connecting them with every part of the world.

He will behold, wielding the sceptre of this wide dominion, a Lady to whom his own panegyric on his great Patroness, may, without flattery, be applied—

She shall be

A pattern to all princes living with her,
And all that shall succeed. Sheba was never
More covetous of wisdom and fair virtue
Than this pure soul shall be. All princely graces
That mould up such a mighty piece as this is,
With all the virtues that attend the good,
Shall still be doubled on her. Truth shall nurse her,
She shall be loved and feared ; her own shall bless her ;
Her foes shall be like a field of beaten corn,
And hang their heads with sorrow. Good grows with her :
In her days every man shall eat in safety,
Under his own vine what he plants, and sing
The merry songs of peace to all his neighbors.
God shall be truly known ; and those about her
From her shall read the perfect ways of honor,
And by those claim their greatness, not by blood.

He will see no barren virgin on the Throne, but a Queen whose children are to embellish the courts of Europe, and to whose bright succession there is a princely Heir in whom all his mother's graces and his father's virtues are combined.

Seeing all this, and knowing that the races, by whom this Throne is upheld, have lived upon his thoughts and more than realized his patriotic prophecies, it is fitting also that Shakspeare should know that his intellectual supremacy is acknowledged—that, as civilization widens his fame extends ; and that, committed to the keeping of an enterprising and energetic people, his memory will follow the course of Empire till time shall be no more !